

HAMILTON COUNTY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS PLAN

I. Department Overview:

The mission of the Community Development Department is to provide quality housing, community and economic development opportunities to disadvantaged families and individuals in Hamilton County in accordance with the federal rules and regulations and for purposes as directed by the Board of County Commissioners.

The Department administers the following federal grants for Hamilton County; the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), and the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) Program. The primary purpose of the CDBG Program is to fund projects in participating communities of Hamilton County that either benefit low to moderate income populations, eliminate slum and bright, or address a particular urgent need. These projects can include public services, redevelopment or new construction of public facilities, rehabilitation of public infrastructure such as streets and sidewalks, economic development activities, and housing activities. The HOME Program specifically addresses housing activities such as acquisition, rehabilitation and new construction of housing for low to moderate income households and tenant based rental assistance. The Emergency Shelter Program provides operational support for the Mt. Airy Shelter. The Department also administers the General Funded Housing Improvement Program (HIP), which provides a 3% interest rate buy down for home improvement loans for qualifying properties in Hamilton County.

Effective August, 2008 the Department will be administering Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) for an additional 85 disabled individuals/families for the City of Cincinnati, through a contract using Cincinnati HOME funds. A part-time Inspector will be hired to help staff that Program.

Core functions:

Administer CDBG Funds by: approving applications for projects requested by communities and agencies, overseeing the activities of those projects, and submitting applications, reports, and information to the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development for receipt of these funds.

Administer HOME Funds by: managing a Tenant Based Rental Assistance Program for 170 families, as well as a Tenant Based Rental Assistance Program for 85 disabled individuals/families for the City of Cincinnati, approving applications for projects requested by CHDO's (Community Housing Development Organizations) and other rental projects, overseeing the activities of these projects, and submitting applications, reports and information to HUD for receipt of these funds.

Administer the Emergency Shelter Grant funds by: approving the applications for these funds by the Mt. Airy Shelter, overseeing the activities of this program, and submitting applications, reports, and information to HUD for receipt of these funds.

Manage the Housing Improvement (HIP) Program by marketing the program, approving applications, monitoring the loans, and submitting reports to the Board of County Commissioners on the progress of the program.

II. Performance Measures and Expectations:

HUD Measurements

CDBG Program (1) Must spend funding timely so that at the end of the Program Year no more than 1 and ½ years worth of funding are in the letter of credit, (2) Must adhere to limit of 20% for planning and administration expenses and 15% for public services. The Department has met this goal each year for the last several years, and is on target to meet this goal for the 2008 Program year, which ends February 28, 2009.

HOME Program – (1) Must commit funding to specific projects within two years of the funding award, (2) Must spend funds within five years of the funding award. The Department has met this goal for the last several years, and recently won an award from HUD for highest in the State for commitment and expenditure for the last five years.

ESG Program – Must spend funds within two years of the funding award. The Department has met this goal for the last several years.

Internal Department Measurements

Activities should be completed within two years of funding award. Currently three projects are still underway from the 2006 Program year, but the goal is to have all three completed by the end of the year.

TBA Program – Lease-up for the year should average between 95% and 105% of the number allocated to the program. During 2008, lease-up is averaging between 102% and 104% monthly.

TBRA Program for City of Cincinnati – Adhere to lease-up schedule as identified in the Contract for services. The lease-up will begin in the 3rd – 4th month of the Contract (Contract began August 1, 2008), after hiring of staff and issuance of grants.

III. Organization Staffing Levels:

The staff of the Department decreased from seven to six with the retirement of the Director in February 2007. With a reorganization of workload between the new Director and the Program Manager, the Deputy Director position was not filled. In November of 2007, the Department was made a part of the Regional Planning Commission, thereby becoming a Division of that County Department. In January 2008 the HIP Program was suspended, but in June 2008 the Program was reinstated. In August, the TBRA Program with the City of Cincinnati began, and hiring of a part-time Inspector to assist with that Program should be accomplished by the end of August.

Much of the workload demand comes from the number and complexity of projects funded by the federal grants. Currently, with the projects in the 2008 Program year Action Plan, existing staff is able to keep up with the workload.

IV. Financial Plan:

The Department receives Federal Funds to administer the CDBG, HOME, and ESG Funds. The Department also receives a small amount of County general funds to operate the HIP Program. The Federal funds are re-appropriated each year by Congress, and

have been declining by a few percent the last few years as Congress has appropriated less funding to domestic entitlement programs and more to both the war in Iraq and homeland security. Funding for 2007, while expected to remain level, actually increased by 13% for Hamilton County. However, funding for 2008 decreased from the 2007 level by 4%.

In the future, monitoring of administrative expenses to ensure compliance with the 20% cap on planning and administration is crucial. Decreases in planning dollars to the Regional Planning Commission and the Hamilton County Development Company are possible if decreases in funding occur in the future.

V. Critical Issues:

Two main critical issues face the Department in the next several years. One is the uncertainty of federal funding, as the appropriations of the CDBG, HOME and ESG dollars are subject to cuts by Congress each year. Intense lobbying by public interest groups brings this problem to the attention of Congressional representatives each year, and thus far funding has not decreased substantially.

The other issue facing the Department, although not as critical as funding, is workforce development. Four of the six staff in the Department are within five years of eligibility for retirement, with one more not far behind. Institutional knowledge is important, and an effort is being made to better document this aspect of the Department.

VI. Key Initiatives:

Key initiatives for 2008 are (1) production of a citizen-friendly version of the HUD Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER), (2) research into new methods of inviting public input into the 3 year funding cycle, (3) better documentation of funded projects with pictures, (4) better documentation of current policies and procedures, and (5) management of the workload and assignments as efficiently as possible. Initiative #1 was accomplished by July 2008, and Initiatives #2 – #5 are underway. New countywide projects under the CDBG funding for 2008 include funding of the Continuum of Care Solutions Initiative, to help streamline and better manage the housing and services for homeless individuals with mental health and substance abuse problems. New projects under the HOME program include development of new homes for low-moderate income households in North College Hill and St. Bernard.